



COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE

This policy is updated and approved by the Governing Body every 3 years

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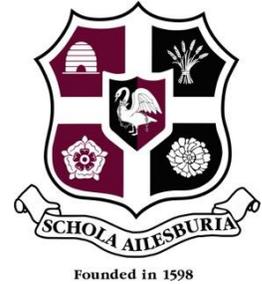
Signed: _____

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'J Collins', is written over a horizontal line.

J Collins – Chairman of Governors

AYLESBURY GRAMMAR SCHOOL

COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE



1. Introduction

- 1.1. This document describes the procedure to address formal complaints, addressed to Aylesbury Grammar School. It is designed to ensure that all concerns or complaints are managed fairly, efficiently and at the appropriate level.
- 1.2. The School defines a “concern” as ‘an expression of worry or doubt over an issue considered to be important for which reassurances are sought’, and a “complaint” as ‘an expression of dissatisfaction about actions taken or a lack of action’. In cases where it is unclear whether a matter is a concern or a complaint, the Headmaster will determine the interpretation.
- 1.3. The School, in collaboration with students and parents, aims to provide an exceptional education. If a parent or member of our community has any concerns about the School or their son’s education, it is important that they contact us at the earliest opportunity.
- 1.4. It is in the best interests of all parties that any concern or complaint is expressed and resolved as quickly and at the earliest possible stage. The underlying principle is that good relations are based on mutual respect and a willingness to listen to other points of view. The purpose of this procedure is to provide a clear structure for the resolution of concerns and complaints and thus ensure that the provision for students is not impaired.

2. Procedure

- 2.1. The procedure has three possible stages. Most cases will begin with the informal stage, and should be addressed in the first instance to the member of staff at the School most likely to be in a position to deal with the concerns expressed. Where a concern cannot be resolved after reasonable efforts to do so informally or a more serious matter is in question, then a written complaint should be sent to the School addressed to the Headmaster.

Stage 1 – Informal Resolution

Most concerns are resolved informally by discussion with staff at the school. More difficult or complex concerns may take more than one discussion.

Stage 2 – Formal Resolution – Written complaint to the Headmaster

A formal complaint can only be made to the Headmaster. This will usually be after careful and reasonable efforts have been made to resolve the matter informally, but it is accepted that a formal complaint relating to a serious matter may be made without first going through Stage 1.

Stage 3 – Formal Resolution – Panel Hearing

Where the complaint has not been resolved satisfactorily at Stage 2 it may be referred to the Governing Body Complaints Panel

3. Stage 1 - Informal Resolution

- 3.1. Most concerns can be resolved informally. The School is happy to receive suggestions and discuss concerns. Where the person raising the concern seeks specific intervention, reconsideration or some other action to be taken, the School will respond with a positive attitude and aim to resolve the concern informally.

- 3.2. In most cases, a teacher or the School Office will receive the first approach. For most concerns, the member of staff should aim to resolve the issue as quickly as reasonably possible. If the member of staff to whom the concern is expressed is uncertain how to resolve the issue, the matter should be referred to the line manager or a senior leader, and the line manager or senior leader will endeavour to resolve the issue under the informal procedures of this procedure. If the member of staff, line manager or senior leader reasonably believes that the approach relates to a more serious issue or complaint, then it must be referred to the Headmaster.
- 3.3. A concern that has not been resolved by informal means within ten working days from the receipt of the concern can be notified as a Formal Complaint in accordance with Stage 2 below either by the person raising the concern or by referral by the member of staff dealing with the concern.
- 3.4. File notes from the staff member(s) dealing with the concern and/or file correspondence between the person raising the concern and the staff member(s) which form the record of concerns raised at Stage 1 of this procedure must be retained and may be referred to at later stages of the process.
- 3.5. It is expected that the person raising the concern will make reasonable attempts to seek an informal resolution at Stage 1 and will act in a reasonable and measured way. If the Chairman of Governors, having been notified of the circumstances by the Headmaster and having regard to relevant documentation, reasonably believes that this expectation has not been met, then he/she may dismiss the concern and will write to the person raising the concern accordingly.

4. Stage 2 – Formal Resolution

- 4.1. Except in the circumstances of paragraph 4.7, all formal complaints must be put in writing, addressed to the Headmaster, set out briefly and clearly the facts and state what it is that the complainant considers should have been done or where the School has not met reasonable expectations.
- 4.2. The complaint will be acknowledged within five working days of receipt.
- 4.3. The Headmaster will appoint an Investigating Officer. This may be the Headmaster himself, or he may delegate the role of Investigating Officer to a senior member of staff, a governor or an independent investigator chosen at his discretion.
- 4.4. The Investigating Officer will investigate the complaint in whatever manner he/she believes appropriate. This may include any or all of (a) offering to meet the complainant to discuss the matter; (b) seeking further information or comment from the complainant and/or others involved; or (c) seeking legal advice. If a meeting with the complainant is offered, then the Investigating Officer will make all reasonable efforts to enable this to take place within **15 school days** of the complaint being received.
- 4.5. The Investigating Officer will put his/her findings in writing. The written findings must include all relevant documentation and information on what, if any, steps have been taken to resolve the matter, and may include recommendations as to resolution. Whenever reasonably possible, this will be done within **15 school days** of the meeting with the complainant and if no meeting is to take place within **15 school days** of the complaint being received.
- 4.6. The Headmaster will inform the complainant of the Investigating Officer's findings by post as soon as reasonably possible.
- 4.7. If the written complaint relates to the Headmaster, this should be addressed to the Chairman of Governors who will, if an informal resolution cannot be reached, designate a Governor to investigate in the same way as in the formal process outlined above.

5. Stage 3 – Formal Resolution – Panel Hearing

- 5.1. If the complainant is not satisfied with the response of the Investigating Officer, then they may request that the Complaints Panel of the Governing Body consider the complaint.
- 5.2. Any such request must be made in writing, addressed to the Clerk to the Governors at Aylesbury Grammar School, within **10 school days** of the Stage 2 response being sent to the complainant. It must set out the reasons why the complainant is dissatisfied with the response, indicating which matters

remain unresolved and what remedy the complainant is seeking. No new complaints may be included in such a request, as these will be subject first to Stage 1 and Stage 2 of the procedure. The Clerk will acknowledge the letter in writing within **one school week**.

- 5.3. If Stage 1 and Stage 2 have not been completed as set out above, the Clerk will respond in writing to the complainant explaining that the Panel cannot address any complaint until Stages 1 and 2 have been completed.
- 5.4. The Clerk will then ask the School to put in writing its response to the complainant's reasons. The School will do this within **15 school days**.
- 5.5. Upon receipt of the School's response, the Clerk will convene a meeting of the Complaints Panel of the Governing Body. This panel will consist of three people in total, all of whom must not previously have been directly involved in the matter or closely personally associated with the complainant or any person about whom the complaint has been made, and one of whom must be independent of the management, governance and running of the School. The Clerk will draw the independent member from an appropriate body at his/her sole discretion.
- 5.6. The Panel meeting will be held as quickly as practicable. Wherever possible, the meeting will be held within **15 school days** of the Clerk receiving the School's response, but it is accepted that given the need to find a date that is reasonably convenient for the complainant, the School and the members of the Panel this timing may not always be achievable.
- 5.7. Those present at the Panel meeting will be the three panel members, the Clerk, the complainant, the Headmaster and the Chairman of Governors. The complainant will be entitled to be accompanied by a friend or companion, as will the Headmaster, and either the complainant or the Headmaster will be entitled to call witnesses. Legal representation will not be allowed.
- 5.8. The Complaints Panel will only proceed if the complainant and/or their representative attend. If the complainant does not confirm attendance or fails to attend on the day without providing reasonable explanation in advance then the Complaints Panel will not proceed and the complainant will lose their right to the complaint being heard. Any further attempt by the complainant to reopen the matter will be considered under the serial/persistent complaint section below.
- 5.9. The Panel will appoint a Chairman, who may be advised on matters of procedure or fact by the Clerk. The role of the Clerk will also be to make a record of the hearing
- 5.10. To ensure that the hearing is fair and rigorous in its procedures, the following steps will be taken:
 - 5.10.1. The Chairman of the Panel will welcome the participants, conduct introductions and outline the proceedings.
 - 5.10.2. The Chairman of the Panel will invite the complainant to present their case; this may include any examination of the witnesses for the complainant.
 - 5.10.3. The person acting on behalf of the School may question the complainant and/or the witnesses after they have spoken.
 - 5.10.4. The Chairman of the Panel will invite the Headmaster to present the School's case and call witnesses. The Headmaster may delegate presentation of the School's case to the Chairman of Governors.
 - 5.10.5. The complainant may question the person presenting the School's case and/or the witnesses after they have spoken.
 - 5.10.6. The Chairman of the Panel will invite the complainant to sum up, including reaffirmation of the remedy they seek.
 - 5.10.7. The Chairman of the Panel will ask the person presenting the School's case to sum up, including describing any actions they have taken in response to the matters raised.
- 5.11. At any stage of the proceedings members of the Panel may ask questions to seek information on any matter raised before them.

- 5.12. Witnesses will only be required to attend for the part of the hearing in which they give their evidence and may be asked by the Chairman of the Panel to leave the meeting at other times.
- 5.13. The Panel will seek to resolve the complaint during the meeting. If this cannot be done, the Panel will deliberate in private after the meeting, accompanied by the Clerk, to decide on its response.
- 5.14. The responses available to the Panel are as follows:
- To uphold the complaint in full or in part,
 - To dismiss the complaint in full or in part,
 - To decide on appropriate action to be taken to resolve the complaint,
 - To recommend changes to the School's systems and/or procedures in order to ensure that problems of similar nature do not recur.
- 5.15. The decision of the panel is final and the panel has full discretion as to the form of the response. In complex cases the Panel may wish to give a complex response.
- 5.16. The Clerk to the Panel will then send a full response in writing by post to the complainant within **five school days**, stating the Panel's response and giving reasons for this response. The Clerk will send a copy of this letter to the Headmaster and to the Chairman of Governors. Subject to the requirement to maintain confidentiality in paragraph 5.18 below, the Headmaster may copy relevant papers to any member of staff named in the complaint.
- 5.17. Having come to a decision about the complaint, the Panel may wish to refer issues of principle or general practice to another forum such as the Governing Body or to an individual such as the Headmaster.
- 5.18. A record will be kept of all complaints and correspondence, statements and records relating to the complaint. This record will be kept on the School premises and access to it will be restricted to the parties involved in the complaint and, on request, the Secretary of State.

6. Serial or Persistent Complainants

- 6.1. If a complainant attempts to reopen an issue or a closely related issue that has already been dealt with under this Complaints Procedure, the Headmaster will refer the matter to the Chairman of Governors. The Chairman of Governors, at his/her discretion, may seek further information or investigation, or may write to the complainant to inform them that the procedure has been exhausted and the matter is closed. The decision of the Chairman of Governors in this respect is final.

7. Unreasonable or Vexatious Complainants

- 7.1. Aylesbury Grammar School is committed to providing a high quality service to those who have a legitimate cause for complaint. However, the School does not expect its staff to have to tolerate unacceptable behaviour or breaches of School policy by parents and visitors. The School has adopted the Department for Education's model Policy for Unreasonable Complainants to employ, if necessary (See Appendix A).
- 7.2. The School will resist abuse of the Complaints Procedure. It will not respond to complaints that are vexatious, repeated or manifestly trivial. It may decline to deal with some complaints where the number and/or type of complaints made by a particular individual or family is unreasonable.
- 7.3. If, at any stage of the Complaints Procedure the Headmaster believes that a complaint is or has become vexatious he may refer the matter to the Chairman of Governors. If it is decided that a complaint is or has become vexatious, the Chairman of Governors will advise the complainant that the School will not respond to the matter further, and that should correspondence continue it will be read and filed but will receive no acknowledgment. The decision of the Governors in this respect is final.
- 7.4. In relation to this section, complaints will be regarded as vexatious when they are:
- Repeatedly or obsessively pursued, or

- Unreasonable or seeking unrealistic outcomes, or
- Reasonable but pursued in an unreasonable manner

Examples are provided in Appendix B.

8. Substitution of roles in relation to this Procedure

- 8.1. In the event that a complaint concerns the conduct of the Headmaster, the Chairman of Governors will present the School's case at any Stage 3 Panel Hearing and may call the Headmaster as a witness.
- 8.2. For any stage of this Procedure, if the Chairman of Governors is unavailable, personally involved or the subject of a complaint, the Vice-Chairman will take on his/her responsibilities in this Procedure.

Appendix A – Policy for Unreasonable Complainants (Based of the Department for Education Model Policy)

Aylesbury Grammar School is committed to dealing with all complaints fairly and impartially, and to providing a high quality service to those who complain. We will not normally limit the contact complainants have with the School. However, we do not expect our staff to tolerate unacceptable behaviour and will take action to protect staff from that behaviour, including that which is abusive, offensive or threatening.

The School defines unreasonable complainants as ‘those who, because of the frequency or nature of their contacts with the school, hinder our consideration of their or other people’s complaints’.

A complaint may be regarded as unreasonable when the person making the complaint:

- refuses to articulate their complaint or specify the grounds of a complaint or the outcomes sought by raising the complaint, despite offers of assistance;
- refuses to co-operate with the complaints investigation process while still wishing their complaint to be resolved;
- refuses to accept that certain issues are not within the scope of a complaints procedure;
- insists on the complaint being dealt with in ways which are incompatible with the adopted complaints procedure or with good practice;
- introduces trivial or irrelevant information which the complainant expects to be taken into account and commented on, or raises large numbers of detailed but unimportant questions, and insists they are fully answered, often immediately and to their own timescales;
- makes unjustified complaints about staff who are trying to deal with the issues, and seeks to have them replaced;
- changes the basis of the complaint as the investigation proceeds;
- repeatedly makes the same complaint (despite previous investigations or responses concluding that the complaint is groundless or has been addressed);
- refuses to accept the findings of the investigation into that complaint where the school’s complaint procedure has been fully and properly implemented and completed including referral to the Department for Education;
- seeks an unrealistic outcome;
- makes excessive demands on school time by frequent, lengthy, complicated and stressful contact with staff regarding the complaint in person, in writing, by email and by telephone while the complaint is being dealt with.

A complaint may also be considered unreasonable if the person making the complaint does so either face-to-face, by telephone or in writing or electronically:

- maliciously;
- aggressively;
- using threats, intimidation or violence;
- using abusive, offensive or discriminatory language;
- knowing it to be false;
- using falsified information;
- publishing unacceptable information in a variety of media such as in social media websites and newspapers.

Complainants should limit the numbers of communications with the School while the complaint is being progressed. It is not helpful if repeated correspondence is sent (either by letter, phone, email or text) as it could delay the outcome being reached.

Whenever possible, the headmaster or Chairman of Governors will discuss any concerns with the complainant informally before applying an 'unreasonable' marking.

If the behaviour continues the Headmaster will write to the complainant explaining that their behaviour is unreasonable and asking them to change it. For complainants who excessively contact Aylesbury Grammar School causing a significant level of disruption, we may specify methods of communication and limit the number of contacts in a communication plan. This will usually be reviewed after six months.

In response to any serious incident of aggression or violence, the concerns and actions taken will be put in writing immediately and the police informed. This may include banning an individual from Aylesbury Grammar School.

Barring from the School Premises

Although fulfilling a public function, Aylesbury Grammar School is a private place. The public has no automatic right of entry. The School will therefore act to ensure that it remains a safe place for students, staff and other members of the community.

If a parent's behaviour is a cause for concern, the School can ask him/her to leave school premises. In serious cases, the Headmaster or Governing Body can notify them in writing that their implied licence to be on School premises has been temporarily revoked subject to any representations that the parent may wish to make.

The School will give the parent the opportunity to formally express their views on the decision to bar in writing.

The decision to bar will be reviewed, taking into account any representations made by the parent, and either confirmed or lifted. If the decision is confirmed the parent will be notified in writing, explaining how long the bar will be in place.

Anyone wishing to complain about being barred can do so, by letter or email, to the Headmaster or Chairman of Governors. However, complaints about barring cannot be escalated to the Department for Education.

Once the School's Complaints Procedure has been completed, the only remaining avenue of appeal is through the Courts.

Appendix B – Examples of vexatious complaints

For the purposes of Section 7 of this procedure, the following list provides examples of complaints which will be regarded as vexatious. Such complaints are those where the complainant(s):-

- Persist in pursuing a complaint where the School's Complaints Procedure has been properly implemented and exhausted (for example, where several responses have been provided).
- Change the substance of a complaint: continually raise new issues, or raise further concerns or questions upon the receipt of a response.
- Are unwilling to accept that the Governors have reached a final decision on a chosen course of action.
- Deny receiving an adequate response in spite of correspondence specifically dealing with the issues raised.
- Persist in pursuing a matter when they have already exhausted all routes of appeal.
- Do not clearly identify the precise issues that they wish to be investigated, despite reasonable efforts to help them specify their concerns.
- Continue to seek to pursue a complaint where the concerns are not within the control of the School or its governance.
- Focus on trivial matters to an extent that is out of proportion to their significance and continue to press only those points.
- Have in the course of addressing a complaint, had an excessive number of contacts with the School representatives placing unreasonable demands on staff time.. A contact may be in person or by telephone, email or fax. (Discretion will be used in determining the precise number of 'excessive contacts' applicable under this section, using judgement based on the specific circumstances of each case).
- Make unreasonable demands on those dealing with a complaint, refusing to accept that these may be unreasonable, for example, insist on responses to complaints or enquiries being provided more urgently than is reasonable or within the Complaints Procedure or normal recognised practice.
- Make repeated counter-complaints against those dealing with the issue, especially with the clear intention of influencing the outcome of the procedure.
- Are known to have recorded meetings or face-to-face/telephone conversations without the prior knowledge and consent of other parties involved.
- Have threatened physical violence towards staff at any time. This will, in itself cause personal contact with the complainant and/or their representatives to be discontinued and the complaint will, thereafter, only be continued through written communication. All such incidences will be documented. The School will consider any complainant who makes threats or used actual physical violence towards staff as a vexatious complaint. The School will inform the complainant of the action to be taken with regard to any further communication received and reserves the right to take legal action in such cases.
- Have harassed or been personally abusive or verbally aggressive on more than one occasion towards staff dealing with the complaint. We recognise that complainants sometimes act out of character in times of stress, anxiety or distress and will make reasonable allowances for this. However, the Governors have a duty of care to their employees and reserve the right to take whatever action is deemed necessary to secure their reasonable safety. Any form of harassment, abusive behaviour or verbal aggression will be recorded and legal action may be taken.
- Actively contravene School policy for visiting the School site and contacting the School in pursuit of a complaint.